

CANBERRA SCHOOL OF ART  
CANBERRA INSTITUTE OF THE ARTS

PRINTMAKING WORKSHOP

POST GRADUATE REPORT, 1991.

BY JACQUI DRIVER

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## INTRODUCTION

"Masquerades of femininity are so internalised that you're almost setting up an impossibility for it to be represented"<sup>1</sup>. Monika Gagnon.

In the ideas which inform and influence my work, I am trying to question some of the accepted stereotypes of femininity. To be a "good" woman involves self-sacrifice, diligence, submission and nurturing, all words used to designate femininity. Yet this is an idealised femininity, it does not allow for the differences within individual women or the inconsistencies within women's "role" itself. One aspect of mastery involves knowing something so well that (you think) you have control over it, but "mastery over the other both imposes authority over it and represses its differences at the same time."<sup>2</sup>.

Kay Schaffer, in her book *Women and the Bush*, feels that the position of women, within Australian culture, is very much linked to language. She sees man's desire for mastery over the bush and women as part of what it means to be Australian.<sup>3</sup> The concept of the inferiority of women is illustrated by the myth that "the bush is all right for men and dogs, but hell on women and horses".<sup>4</sup> The isolation of many pioneer women would not have helped their self-esteem, especially when faced with the mateship of their male counterparts, which relies heavily on the exclusion of women.

Overall in Australian culture, there seems to be this fear of the threat of feminism. Is it actually a fear of the breakdown of the polarised gender roles? Is the popularity of such films as *Crocodile Dundee*, which both romanticises and parodies the hero and heroine, actually because of a sense of nostalgia for a time when the stereotypes of men and women were stable, predictable and clearly defined? Why is there this fear? Is it because of a loss of mastery? Will dismantling the 'truth' lead to an "untamed irrationalism [that] will sweep our civilised values from under us"?<sup>5</sup> And is this a bad thing?

With post-modernism comes the breakdown of ideologies based on universal truths such as History, Religion, Philosophy, etc. Deconstruction is described as a decentring of these old truths, so instead of replacing them with new truths there is now a recognition of the differences, multiple layered meanings and the subjectivity, within these old truths. The problems which arise with deconstruction are partly caused by language itself. Within language there is always a memory of previous

usage, as Barthes argues "language is never innocent: words have a second order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings."6

Historically women's work was produced on a small scale, often because of space restrictions. By producing lithographs on a larger scale, I am commenting on some of the power plays often overlooked within the art world. The dominance of large work in galleries, or the threat caused by the monumental scale of something usually small and powerless. Similarly I involve the landscape because women are often metaphorically represented by the land. Yet within Australian culture the bush is seen as something hostile to man (which involves a desire to conquer) or as a monstrous place capable of absorbing the unprepared. So I am playing with the idea of the evil mother capable of devouring her own children. Or the "phallic mother whose image constantly threatens to undermine the phallogentric order."7.

I have produced a series of threatening roses. To create an awareness of the multiple layers of meaning in my work, I juxtapose my large roses with other forms, for example, eyes, tongues, fallopian tubes, worms, etc. This is to cause a paradox within the image which reinforces the uncomfortable psychological aspect of my work. For comparison, the *Vanitas* paintings, by seventeenth century Dutch artists, used iconography that was easily understood by their society. Their still life paintings represented our fragile existence on earth and juxtaposed accepted symbols; lizards, butterflies, decaying fruit, etc. to emphasize their moral message.8. I have used these forms in my work, even though this iconography is not now so commonly understood. Their use of flowers, fruit and other forms in various stages of life, death and decay, have provided me with a rich, pointed and useful source of ideas.

I am aware that roses are imbued with strong seductive codes in our culture. However, in my work I abstract the rose, using stark monochromatic forms with spirals and swirling effects. I bleed print (print to the edges of the paper) and section the images, to create an uncomfortable feeling in the viewer and to counteract some of the seductive pull of the rose.

Overall, I hope my images expose some of the paradoxes faced by being a woman in this society.



**The Shroud**

Lithograph

152 x 112 cm



## THE SHROUD

"The place assigned woman by Lacan is one of absence of "otherness"... This position of otherness in relation to language and power poses serious challenges to the woman artist who wishes to assume the role of speaking subject rather than accept that of object."9. Whitney Chadwick.

This image is an expression of how I felt coming to Canberra, I had this need to project a very rock-like and solid exterior, I felt shrouded and could not bare to be "seen". I was veiled and visible only on the surface. I was alone, I had no history (but there is a lack of womens history). I felt I was being judged by the people I met by my appearance, my body language. I had to be assertive, (but not aggressive), be intelligent (but not competitive), be diligent with my work but at the same time sensitive to others needs. I felt inconsistent. Was I being caught up in a myth of femininity?

In the 1990 Biennale I was inspired by an installation of Barbara Bloom's called, "Seven Deadly Sins". In the Biennale catalogue, *Art is Easy*, Susan Tallman writes, "Bloom has specialised in creating things and situations that quietly question the connections between what we see and what we believe"10. What we see and what we believe reminded me of our need for myths in Australian culture, our belief in the "great" tradition of mateship (which relies heavily on the polarities between the masculine and the feminine). Woman can never be just simply excluded from mateship but are important in upholding it, they represent what man is not, the opposition. Something man can be judged against. "The differences between men and women, 'real' Australians and others, at the most fundamental level, are not those marked by biology or politics, history, country of origin or socialization, but by systems of meaning embedded in language and social practice."11.

By producing this threatening, rock-like rose, was I only reinforcing the cultural tradition of this femininity? "What is not man". With its harsh landscape elements, am I only fueling this myth by representing the primal mother who eats her children, or creating an object of desire, (something which can be conquered, understood and therefore mastered?) If visual imagery and our myths are such strong influences on how we see, is it possible to subvert their meaning by manipulating accepted visual metaphors?



**Subtle Yet Paramount**

Lithograph

152 x 112 cm

### SUBTLE YET PARAMOUNT

Gaston Bachelard, in his book *The Poetics of Space*, talks about spaces, and our memories of them, having an unconscious influence over our emotional responses. He talks of attics and the positive feelings associated with them. "Up near the roofline all our thoughts are clear. In the attic it is a pleasure to see the bare rafters of the strong framework."<sup>12</sup> With this image, as an experiment with emotional response to some of Bachelard's ideas, I kept the focal point very high, this was to try and create a feeling of happiness or lightness.

This image is about love and the inconsistencies involved with it. The structured stamens represent thought and their tongues searching upwards are the lust element. Out of their looming shadow are thorns crossing a turbulent sky, they deny the negative aspects of love. So it is about the double edge of love, with its overwhelming happiness and its vulnerability. The frightening amount of trust involved, yet the desire which helps to offset it. It is about the conflicting emotions of jealousy and possession with freedom and self-confidence.

The paradox is with trying to use the rose to express thought. If the rose is traditionally seen as feminine, and is therefore coded as seductive, sensuous, soft, clitoral, passionate, a skin on silken skin, it is also associated with the body. But the body is quite intellectually removed from the mind (which is associated with the masculine). So by using an accepted metaphor for femininity, am I reinforcing it with what is "negated, devalued and relegated to secondary status in knowledge and in social production,"<sup>13</sup> By making a rose, something that is usually soft and powerless, monumental and visible, is it possible to create a feeling of unease within this image?

These are some of the questions I was faced with at this stage of my study program. They forced me to reconsider how I was using the rose. My images were still identifiably roses and I was feeling limited by the literalness of the stamens, thorns and petals. I needed to somehow change my object into a subject.





**Just Being**

Lithograph

152 x 112 cm

### JUST BEING

This image is about my body on a psychological level. The child's hands represent an emotional sense of loss which I had started getting with every period. Intellectually, I do not want a child, but monthly I started drowning in waves of sadness. PMT is something other women suffered from, something alien to me, now suddenly I was getting it. I was told, "All women get PMT as they get older", I felt like an imbecile not knowing. It was my lack. Lack of knowledge, lack of children and I am thirty! My body, which I thought I knew so well, was confusing me, how could I be reduced to tears each month with such cyclic regularity? I felt out of control yet I thought I was so stable emotionally. I was desiring a child I did not want.

In this image the rose occupies the whole space, it has become an organic environment, there is a feeling of movement, a shifting space, a journey. There is a vulnerability about the fallopian tubes, they are like child's hands but in caricature, they overshadow a nesting centre, a mother protector nurturing small rocks. It represents this cycle within me, this natural part of me, that I find so hard to accept. Are these desires for a child physical? I am aware of the power of my body, my sensuality, my fertility. Or are they because of social pressure - thirty and running out of time?

The paradox of just being.



**Thats Not It**  
Lithograph  
152 x 112 cm

### THATS NOT IT

"A woman cannot be; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being." and "it follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say "Thats not it" and "Thats still not it".<sup>14</sup> Julia Kristeva.

My title has obviously derived from the Julia Kristeva quote used above, "thats not it" and "thats still not it" are terms I often feel when I am trying to find a visual language that expresses some of the paradoxes I want to unveil.

With this image I have used perspective to try and create a feeling of looking down into something that is unknown. A black space. Gaston Bachelard, in his book *The Poetics of Space*, talks of cellars as being the dark entity of the house, the subterranean element. "When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths."<sup>15</sup> I have dreams of looking down into darkness, looking into my fears yet seeing only myself reflected back at me. I have used a spiral because I wanted to convey this feeling of being caught up in something I cannot get out of. Of being both inside and outside at the same time. "Entrapped in being, we shall always have to come out of it. And when we are hardly outside of being, we always have to go back to it."<sup>16</sup> I am being faced with myself and my fear of being, I know if I scream loudly, my cry will only be an insignificant noise in the vastness of society. (Possibly even seen as hysterical.)

This image is about intensity. I feel I often have many different eyes, with many viewpoints, judging the world from under the cover of a happy disposition. I am staring at myself, staring at my image, I am aware that the reflection of myself is an illusion of me. It is a social construct or an external reflection of myself, which is also being mediated through the eyes of others. This image is both different from me and the same as me. I am at one remove from the image, I recognise what I am not but also what I desire to be. Am I being constituted through a linguistic system of meanings?<sup>17</sup>



**The Unknown**

Lithograph

152 x 114 cm



### THE UNKNOWN

"Clearly one way of analysing the process in which man becomes women is to regard it, from a male perspective, as the ultimate scenario of powerlessness, the ultimate violation of the body. In *Alien* the scenes in which man 'concieves' and gives birth through his stomach are represented as major scenarios of horror: the oral 'impregnation' of the man, the details of the birth scene, his pain, the savage tearing apart of his stomach, the horrified faces of the crew - all these are shown in graphic detail."<sup>18</sup> Barbara Creed.

This fear of women's body and her reproductive abilities is often the subject matter of sci-fi horror films. It seems within these films, such as *Alien*, we are allowed to be horrified by the pain of childbirth and by the Alien Mother's reproductive system (which actually closely resembles our own). We accept the alienness of reproduction, with scenes of its claustrophobic corridors (like fallopian tubes) and womb-like interior spaces as something able to express "abject horror" and "awesome powers".

If it is part of our cultural beliefs to view women's body as something alien, and as such, unknown and terrifying, it reinforces women's uneasiness with her own reproductive cycles. It is very easy for me to distance myself from my monthly cycles as something beyond me, not me, and to feel incredibly annoyed with menstrual pain and its demands on my time and energy. I would like to call this image my pain image. It is about this thing within you that takes over your body once a month and can cause incredibly debilitating pain. Women, it seems, are expected to accept gynaecological problems, pain and childbirth, as something natural to them. Despite these popular culture influences.

This image was made in anger and frustration.



**Mad, Improper, Unclean**

Lithograph  
152 x 114 cm



### **MAD, IMPROPER, UNCLEAN**

"In her work on the maternal body, Kristeva raises the problem for psychoanalytic theory of how this body is to be defined. On the one hand, the mother, through her body, guarantees the continuation of the species; the mother is on the side of nature. Yet on the other hand, the maternal body is also the sight of separations in relation to which subjectivity is instituted. Thus the mother is also on the side of the symbolic."19. Barbara Creed.

This work is about the maternal body. I wanted to represent the seductive fertile body of the mother, with a fleshy environment and velvety soft black spaces. She is the giver of life. Her menstrual blood has nourished each of us through our first months of existence. Yet, the middle of the image is being eaten away by worms. This woman is defective, she is diseased, the mutilated other, (she is castrated). That comforting space in the maternal body is being lost to us. She is the sight of loss. She is the first source of loss, we lose her body at birth and she is the first source of our knowledge of any sexual difference between us.20.

There is a horror of menstrual blood yet it sustains life. There is a fear of separation from the mother yet we begin to perceive ourselves as individuals because of it. My image represents the power of the maternal body. The fear it represents as one of difference, as a source of pain through loss. The worms represent cervical cancer. What effect has the maternal body on you when you know the soft and seductive flesh, is only on the outside?



**Reality**  
Lithograph  
152 x 114 cm

REALITY

"The female body can speak from a standpoint of unworkable cliché and self-exploitation, but it can also speak with a terrifying and truthful presence that is anything but Other."21. Joanna Frueh.

I am pointing the finger

subjecting you to my taunt

I am feeling carressing touching

I poke!

I am wriggling and bending

Yet only joking.

## POSTSCRIPT

I have not mentioned the influence of other artists within my individual texts, because I wanted them to be as direct and confronting as the images are. I wanted to take advantage of the freedom with writing offered to me in this report, which has none of the academic limitations of a thesis or a dissertation. However, I have been influenced by many artists and their work in different ways. Some of my strongest influences I have acknowledged below.

Pat Steir; whose sectioned flower paintings magnify her first image until it becomes quite abstract, which allowed me to realise the potential of abstracting the rose.

Wendy Stavriannos' installation "8 Veiled Traits", uses the same image of a veiled woman while changing the smaller images within her womb.

Although I had already been juxtaposing my roses with smaller images, I found this installation particularly interesting, because of the use of the shroud and the women's body.

Neil Emmerson; whose multi sectioned lithographs first gave me the idea of sectioning to gain the monumental size I required. Plus he uses a grid of backing paper which makes it possible to hang the work without damaging the prints themselves. Something I adopted gratefully, with the encouragement of Yvonne Boag.

Mary Kelly ; whose work I find both intellectually stimulating and very witty, has always been inspirational to me.

Michael Bognar; whose installation of screenprints made me realise how effective large works on paper can be to create an environment within a gallery.

Narelle Jubelin; who deconstructs Australian myths in her work and first gave me the idea of looking at the myth of femininity.

Other artists include: the Dutch flower painters, Maria Van Oosterwyck and Rachel Ruysch; Georgia O'Keefe's flower paintings; Freda Kahlo for her juxtapositioning of subjects to create personal statements; Barbara Bloom's "Seven Deadly Sins"; and Judy Chicago and all the other "Dinner Party" artists for their use of central core imagery.

## CONCLUSION

I see myself as an artist who is concerned with some of the issues that have come to the surface through both the Post-Modern and Feminist debates during the eighties. I use central core imagery because I believe the sensuality of it allows me great freedom to work both with and against. When I started using rose imagery I had no idea of the enormity of its powers of seduction. It made me question my use of such imagery - how strongly did I want my work to be associated with the body? As my imagery developed and became more abstract, I realised I had maintained a sensuality within my images (at first quite unconsciously). And I now realise I am using the body as an expression of my power. I am intrigued by the unconscious effect of popular culture films like *Aliens* or *Dead Ringers* which allow us to be horrified by womens reproductive capacities. But also by the music video industry and their feminisation of the male or their use of bi-sexual performance to enhance the singers image, which seems to reinforce the positive side of being a women, to re-evaluate our sensuality.<sup>22</sup>

I have used my own experiences as an insight into some of the stereotypes encountered within society, but I feel my imagery goes beyond the personal. I certainly want my imagery to be seen with all its softness and sensuality, it is about fecundity as much as it is about exposing the paradox of being. Overall, I want my imagery to invoke the empowerment of women.

**FOOTNOTES**

1. Gagnon, M. "Mary Kelly's Corpus" Interim catalogue. p.32.
2. Schaffer, K. "Women and the Bush" p.50.
3. The image of the bushman as the national hero, represents the ethos of mateship which is reinforced by its opposition to femininity. It is necessary to maintain this opposition, this mastery over the other (woman or the bush) for the concept of mateship to exist at all. Refer to Schaffer, K. *ibid.* pp.13-50.
4. Dixon, M. "The Real Matilda" p.185.
5. Hilary Lawson in her introduction to "Dismantling Truth - Reality in the Post-Modern World" p.xii. Lawson, H. and Appignanesi, L. (Editors)
6. Barthes, R. "Writing Degree Zero" p.16.
7. Creed, B. "From Here to Modernity. Feminism and Post-Modernism." *Screen* Vol.28 no.2 Spring 1987. p.55.
8. Sutherland Harris, A. and Nochlin, L. "Women Artists 1550-1950" p.146
9. Chadwick, W. "Women, Art and Society" p.12
10. Biennale of Sydney, 8th, 1990. "The Readymade Boomerang" p.372.
11. Schaffer, K. *ibid.* p.13.
12. Bachelard, G. "The Poetics of Space" p.18. Bachelard explains how spaces where we have daydreamed or where we have had moments of solitude, remain fixed in our memories. So that our thoughts of these spaces are associated with these daydreams.
13. Creed, B. *ibid.* p.36.
14. Chadwick, W. *ibid.* p.13.
15. Bachelard, G. *ibid.* p.18.
16. Bachelard, G. *ibid.* pp.213-214. Here he discusses the relationship of Being to the spiral.
17. To help express this complex reflection of myself, I have freely used and played with Lacan's Mirror Stage of the child. Refer to Lacan, J. "Ecrits" pp.1-7. and Schaffer, K. *ibid.* pp.7-8.
18. Creed, B. *ibid.* p.60.
19. Creed, B. "Phallic Panic: male hysteria and 'Dead Ringers'." *Screen*, volume 31 no.2 Summer 1990. p.140.
20. See Kaja Silverman, "The Acoustic Mirror: the female voice in psychoanalysis and cinema." pp.14-38, for a description of symbolic castration (the fear of separation) in relation to women. Plus, Elizabeth Grosz, "Futur\*Fall: Excursions into Post-Modernity." p113, for an explanation of the abject in relation to women's body.
21. Frueh, J. "Has the Body Lost its Mind?" *High Performance*. no.46 Summer 1989. p.46.
22. Straayer, C. "The She-man: Postmodern bi-sexed performance in film and video." *Screen*, volume 31 no.3, Autumn 1990. pp.268-271.



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## WORK PROPOSAL

### Aims/ Subject

The softness and sensuality of roses carry feminine connotations. By using roses as a symbol for woman, I am questioning some of the accepted labels of femininity.

My aim is to produce a series of threatening, monumental roses which are more than "just a rose". The monumental scale is to acknowledge the power plays firmly entrenched within society, for example, the dominance and threat of monumental architecture, (Parliament House, the State Library of New South Wales, etc.) or the knowledge = power structure within our social systems (Universities, Law, etc.). Women have been historically seen as soft and powerless, therefore I am reversing that concept and making visible, what is usually the invisible. By combining common, recognisable symbols with the rose imagery, I am juxtaposing the known with the unknown and introducing paradoxes within the images.

Women are often metaphorically represented by the land or nature, yet within Australian culture the land is seen as the heart, the interior, but is also known as a monstrous place where men may die. By pushing the roses into landscapes, I am exploring the myth of the land capable of absorbing the unprepared, the evil mother? Possibly by representing a feeling of vertigo within the rose.

Introducing eyes within my imagery will explore the judgmental element of being a woman, being judged, judging the superficiality of "looks", being "seen". But also the opposite, the veiling of women's power within society, the veiling caused by myths and within language.

Using other recognisable symbols I will examine the alienness of our reproductive system, the unknown, the rejector yet the nurturer and mother protector.

Finally I hope the paradox within the imagery causes a sense of unease and questioning and there is an acknowledgement of the differences and multiplicity of meaning within the roses.

### Reference Points/Limitations

The rose is an established symbol within our cultural history and as such will be read with all its connotations, that is, sensuous, soft, clitoral, passionate, feminine, etc. whatever my intentions. But, by using this knowledge and juxtaposing this symbol with other strongly identifiable

symbols, I intend to exploit the limitations caused by using obvious symbols, to create an intensity within my imagery.

#### Methods/Materials

I intend to use lithographic techniques, which I have been studying and developing over the past five years. I find lithography a rich and seductive medium which enhances the concepts within my imagery.

I have been influenced by a number of theorists and will provide a full bibliography with my final report.

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

### **Jacqui Driver**

Born: Wellington, New Zealand, March 9th, 1960.

### **EDUCATION**

- 1990-91 Graduate Diploma of Art. Canberra School of Art, Canberra Institute of the Arts, Canberra. (Currently being under taken)
- 1987-89 Bachelor of Art (Visual Art). City Art Institute, Sydney. (Major - Lithography)
- 1985-86 Art Certificate. School of Art and Design. East Sydney Technical College, Sydney. (Major - Printmaking)

### **PRIZES**

- 1989 Second Prize. Printmaking section, National Student Art Award. Mitchell College of Advanced Education. Bathurst.

### **GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

- 1990 Sun, Smoke and Steel. Studio One. Canberra.
- 1990 Art in Action. Action Bus. Canberra.
- 1990 Tokyo/Canberra Student Exchange Print Show. Foyer Gallery. Canberra Institute of the Arts. Canberra.
- 1990 Telecom Fine Art Scholarships. Ivan Dougherty Gallery. Sydney.
- 1989 Graduating Students' Show. The Works Gallery. Sydney.
- 1989 National Student Art Award. Mitchell College of Advanced Education. Bathurst.
- 1989 Invited Artist. Sydney Printmakers Annual Exhibition. Blaxland Gallery. Sydney.
- 1989 Irish/Australian Exchange Exhibition. Concourse Gallery. Dublin. Also touring Cork and Limerick.
- 1989 Three Way Print Show. The Works Gallery. Sydney.
- 1988 Women's Show. Cell Block Theatre. Sydney.
- 1988 Invited Artist. Sydney Printmakers Annual Exhibition. Blaxland Gallery. Sydney.
- 1988 Sydney Printmakers Exhibition. Macquarie University. Sydney.
- 1987 Exchange Print Exhibition. Sydney College of the Arts. Sydney.
- 1986 Invited Artist. Sydney Printmakers Annual Exhibition. Blaxland Gallery. Sydney.
- 1986 Barry Stern Print Award. Cell Block Theatre. Sydney.

### **Collections**

College of Fine Art, University of New South Wales.  
Charles Sturt University.